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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

249th Meeting

Monday, 29 November 1999, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Ka . . . . . (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly; Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Security Council; Mr. John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Mr. Francesc Vendrell, Officer in Charge of the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I wish also to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, as well as members of the press and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I would now like to invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and the return of peace in the region.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): Please allow me at this point to make a statement in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We have gathered here today once again to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We are greatly honoured by the presence at this meeting today of so many guests and participants. This event, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, always provides the international community with an opportunity to voice its support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

As you are aware, Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations were resumed recently after a lengthy and disturbing period of lethargy. The parties have taken promising steps, as provided for in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum signed last September. The signing of that important document has now opened the door for a series of measures on issues of crucial importance to the Palestinians and the Israelis. Those issues included a withdrawal of Israeli troops from new areas of the West Bank, the release of 350 Palestinian prisoners and the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The long-awaited resumption of negotiations on permanent status issues was another tangible result of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, enabling the parties to reach an understanding on a timetable for concluding a framework agreement and a final agreement. We are all acutely aware that the issues on the table are complex and highly

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emotional. But they also raise justifiable hopes for the future relationship between the two peoples. The work ahead would appear to be difficult and laborious, but with good will and determination the parties will be able to overcome the differences that may arise, and the efforts that have been made thus far will not be in vain.

We venture to hope that both Israelis and Palestinians will follow the letter and the spirit of the agreements signed and will implement them in full and in good faith, in accordance with the agreed timetables. As the negotiations on the permanent status issues continue, it is incumbent on the parties to honour the commitments they have assumed so as to preserve the integrity of the peace process.

It is nevertheless regrettable that despite the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, some measures taken by the Israeli Government — notably the continuing construction of settlements — threaten to complicate the current negotiations. The international community has on many occasions emphasized the unacceptability and illegality of settlement construction. It is fundamentally altering the physical character of the area, creating faits accomplis on the ground and shifting the territorial balance in favour of one side. Thus, in one way or another, the settlements are predetermining the outcome of the permanent status talks. They constitute a form of continuing occupation and thereby contravene the basic premises of the Middle East peace process and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The future of the Holy City of Jerusalem is yet another issue of concern to the international community, particularly in the light of the many illegal actions taken that are aimed at completely changing the status, demographic composition and physical character of the international Holy City. The peace process will not succeed unless we capitalize on its accomplishments and unless the parties are capable of embracing the historic opportunity presented to them to negotiate in good faith in order to reach, under optimal conditions, a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. For its part, the United Nations will continue to assume its permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects.

In this connection, the Committee has noted the important initiatives taken by the Secretary-General in support of the peace process, in particular the recent appointment of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

This year's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is unique in that it is taking place at the threshold of a new millennium, as the Palestinian people look ahead with aspirations for a brighter future for their children — a future of peace, harmony and prosperity.

As you are also aware, the world is soon to celebrate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem, at the dawn of the new century. This event is of historic significance not only for the Palestinian people and the region, but also for believers throughout the world who will make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and who will see there the lighting of the star of peace and hope in the region.

The General Assembly has once again this year unanimously adopted a resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000", thereby reflecting its faithful support for the historic commemoration that will commence next month and continue until Easter 2001. We all hope that the Bethlehem 2000 celebration will bring a unique opportunity for dialogue among people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, in a spirit of understanding and tolerance and in an atmosphere of reconciliation and peace. The Committee wishes to take this opportunity to renew its call to the international community to spare no effort to ensure the success of the Bethlehem 2000 project, launched in 1997 by the Palestinian Authority.

All of you who are actively and resolutely participating in the settlement of the question of Palestine — Governments, sponsors of the peace process, intergovernmental organizations, organizations and institutions of civil society and individuals — should continue to contribute to the building of broad-based support essential for the peace process and the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Allow me to reiterate here, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the strong support of the members of our Committee for this noble goal.

We should like to take the opportunity afforded by this ceremony to offer solemn thanks to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the active support he has always given to the Committee's activities and for the discrete and effective diplomatic efforts that he is constantly making to move the peace process forward.

We would also like to thank the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council for the interest they show in the work of the Committee.

The Bureau and the members of the Committee have noted with great satisfaction the presence of a great number of representatives whose monarchs, heads of State and heads of Government have transmitted to us messages of support that have provided us with inspiration and encouragement.

Lastly, I am pleased to welcome among us the representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and I should like to ask them to convey to the Secretaries-General of those two organizations the Committee's deep appreciation for the invaluable tripartite cooperation that has developed among us since 1997 on the question of Palestine.

In conclusion, I should like to call on all the representatives of Member States and of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations who are present here today to redouble their efforts in order to consolidate and support the peace process, especially during this pivotal transitional phase. A peaceful future for the Palestinians, for the Israelis and for all the peoples and nations of the region has perhaps never been so close as it is today. Let us not allow this opportunity to slip through our fingers.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab.

Mr. Gurirab (Namibia), President of the General Assembly: The General Assembly, in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, and in subsequent resolutions, called for the annual observance of this day, in recognition of the need to promote and support the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination, peace and independence.

Once again, we are gathered here under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to commemorate another International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and to pray for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It is my fervent hope that one day, sooner rather than later, there will be no need to hold this particular commemoration at the United Nations except to recall it for the purposes of history. But this is only a wish. We are not there yet, hence the need to continue the commemoration.

For the international community, it has become an occasion to renew its pledge to continue supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and statehood on the basis of the United Nations Charter, the principles of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the declarations of various international conferences.

In April this year, my country, Namibia, hosted the African meeting in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which was organized by this Committee. I was the guest of honour and keynote speaker on that occasion. The meeting adopted the Windhoek Declaration. It also reiterated the continued commitment of African States to assist, by all practical and peaceful means, the Palestinian people to realize their cherished goals. The Committee, moreover, endorsed the Bethlehem 2000 project, spearheaded by the Palestinian Authority.

The question of Palestine has been of major concern to the United Nations for over 50 years. Regrettably, General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 ran into a premeditated war of defiance and unilateralism. The resolution could not be implemented. That, and the strategic projections of major Powers, turned the region into a cold-war zone of confrontation. It has been a long walk since then, and an amicable, just and durable solution to the question of Palestine as well as a comprehensive peace in the Middle East have remained elusive.

Five decades later, the problem remains the oldest unresolved issue on the agenda of the United Nations. Now, following a long stalemate and against the backdrop of the Oslo agreements, including other continuing efforts by various interlocutors, the peace negotiations have been revived. The signing of the Sharm El-Sheik Memorandum on 4 December this year was a major breakthrough. The international community was gratified that the parties, assisted by the co-sponsors, finally succeeded in breathing new life into the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

This achievement has made possible the resumption of further negotiations, including progress on some of the outstanding technical matters: the release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of safe passage routes, and agreement on modalities concerning issues such as timetable and final status negotiations. The current status and future of the city of Jerusalem must be the subject of continuing negotiations in the best interests of followers of all faiths, for whom it is a Holy City. The way forward relating to the important negotiations on the permanent status is now open.

Thus, the urgent task of the international community must be to help the parties through this critical period so that the peace process can come to fruition for the benefit of all the peoples in the Middle East. I know that the sponsors of the peace process — the United Nations and indeed the international community as a whole — remain firmly committed to assisting the parties in reaching that ultimate goal, in the spirit of constructive dialogue, mutual respect and compromise which they are now manifesting. This is absolutely crucial to the achievement of what we all desire: international peace, stability and security in the region.

I wish to reaffirm the General Assembly's position that the United Nations continues to have a direct interest in the peace process and is upholding its responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement is reached — a settlement based on self-determination, justice and mutual commitment to good neighbourliness.

We all know that for peace to take root and become viable in the Middle East, it must be accompanied by social and economic development. Simply put, there can be no peace without development. Both peace and development need committed friends and assistance on a sustained basis. Both the United Nations family and the international donor community should intensify their efforts aimed at providing the much-needed economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people, now and in the future.

Under your able and dedicated leadership, Sir, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has done so much to keep the question of Palestine among the most burning issues on the agenda of the General Assembly, as well as on the conscience of the entire global community. Over the past year your Committee has engaged tirelessly in activities aimed at promoting the Bethlehem 2000 project, which was considered recently by the General Assembly. In this connection, I have received an invitation from President Yasser Arafat to attend the Bethlehem celebrations, and I look forward to doing so. I wish to commend the Committee for all this and urge it to stay on the right track until the job is done.

The achievement of common peace, security, cooperation and development in the Middle East will be a fitting tribute to the memories of all those who have died in pursuit of these noble objectives, and it will also be a victory for the United Nations itself, as we enter the new millennium.

There is a time for war, hatred and destruction; now is the time for freedom, peace, reconciliation and building together. This, I believe, is what Israel wants, and this is also what all its neighbours want, particularly the Palestinians.

In diligently implementing the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, your famous Committee has made and continues to make sterling contributions towards promoting that most desirable goal. I want to wish you every success in your noble mission.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly, for his statement. I also urge him to convey to President Sam Nujoma, the head of State of Namibia, our thanks for the support that the Government of Namibia gave the Committee in organizing the meeting in Windhoek in order to reconfirm the support of all of Africa for the Palestinian people.

I now have the honour and the great pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: It gives me great pleasure to join the Committee for this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Each year we come together to commit ourselves anew to the goal of finding a solution to the question of Palestine, which lies at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This event also reminds us of the pressing need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace throughout the Middle East.

This year we meet against the backdrop of revitalized negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Since the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum last September, we have seen the further redeployment of troops from the West Bank, an agreement on the release of prisoners, the opening of a safe-passage corridor between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the resumption of the permanent-status negotiations. And at the trilateral summit in Oslo earlier this month, the parties agreed to set up additional negotiating mechanisms and a timetable and framework for the final-status agreements.

I would like to commend Mr. Ehud Barak, Prime Minister of Israel, and Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, for their courage and wisdom in pursuing peace and reconciliation. Their efforts have rekindled our hopes that peace — based on Security

Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — may finally come to the region.

Regrettably, there are still difficulties on the ground that continue to pose obstacles to progress. So I would also like to call on the parties to guard the fragile accomplishments of the peace process, to press forward and, above all, to refrain from any actions that might prejudice the outcome of the delicate permanent-status negotiations.

Though important differences remain to be worked out, we can all agree that peace is much more likely to blossom in an atmosphere of improving economic and social conditions. That is why United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), will remain deeply involved in providing humanitarian aid, health care and education and in fostering agricultural, industrial and commercial development.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate UNRWA on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. UNRWA continues to be a vital lifeline for more than 3 million refugees, and I urge the donor community to do all it can to put an end to the Agency's chronic financial constraints and ensure that its dedicated staff have the resources and tools they need to carry out their vital work.

The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories is another expression of the keen interest taken by the United Nations in the situation. I recently appointed Terje Rød-Larsen of Norway as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and as my Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. I know he will do his utmost to enhance the assistance provided by the United Nations to the Palestinian people and to ensure that United Nations support of the peace process is as effective as possible.

The peace process has now entered a phase that is at once its most promising and its most difficult. The continued support of the international community, including Governments, donor countries and institutions and civil society, remains crucial. And this Committee has provided unwavering support for the Palestinian people throughout their many decades of suffering. The United Nations family likewise remains strongly committed to the cause.

On the twentieth century's last International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, let us dare to hope that one of the new century's earliest achievements will be the long-awaited moment when peace and prosperity can be enjoyed in full by Palestinians, Israelis and all the other peoples of the Middle East.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for all his efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and for his constant support for the work of the Committee. The Secretary-General's statements always inspire us to commit ourselves to do all in our power to support the peace process.

I call next on His Excellency Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia), President of the Security Council: Allow me at the outset to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation extended to me in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November to participate in this special meeting held to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to join in this important annual event, in which the international community demonstrates its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its enduring commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with United Nations resolutions. This annual observance is not just a symbolic act of solidarity with a people struggling for the realization of its inalienable rights, but also a reflection of the importance attached to the need to bring about the long-awaited solution to the question of Palestine, which has preoccupied the international community for more than 50 years. We all recognize that such a solution remains a key element of the overall endeavour to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As members are aware, for decades the Security Council has been engaged in various aspects of the question of Palestine and in efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. In that regard, it is appropriate to note that the current peace process, launched in Madrid in 1991, has had for its basis Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Last September we welcomed the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization as

an important step forward in the Middle East peace process. The members of the Security Council expressed their belief that the new agreement opens the way for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, within a reasonable time-frame, in the entire region, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 and 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973. The Security Council condemned vigorously all acts of terrorism and violence in the region. The Council called upon all parties to implement in full their commitments under existing agreements and to abide scrupulously by their obligations under international law.

The members of the Security Council continue to be determined to keep developments under review and to provide the necessary backing, giving full support to the agreements reached as well as to the timely and speedy implementation of those agreements.

As the Palestinian people are going through a difficult period of transition, they need considerable economic assistance in many areas. In this regard, the Council is grateful to all those organizations and entities within the United Nations family, as well as in the international donor community, that have been providing and that continue to provide invaluable economic assistance to the Palestinian people. To succeed, this undertaking should be focused, well coordinated and, above all, sustained.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): The Committee is grateful to the President of the Security Council for having had the sensitivity to postpone to this afternoon the meeting of the Security Council on prevention of armed conflicts.

I call now on His Excellency Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out a letter from His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat addressed to the participants in this meeting. The text of the letter reads as follows:

> "On the important occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am pleased to convey to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, at its solemn meeting held at United Nations Headquarters, and through it to the entire international community, the warmest greetings of the Palestinian people and of the Palestinian leadership. I convey our deepest thanks and appreciation for the Committee's solidarity with our people and its support for its struggle to secure its inalienable rights and put in place a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region.
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> "The United Nations, which has been dealing with the question of Palestine ever since its inception, will bear continuing legal, political and moral responsibility with regard to that issue until it has been resolved in every respect. Over the years, the United Nations has in fact upheld the rights of our people and has adopted many resolutions on this subject, based on the Charter of the United Nations, on international law and international humanitarian law. Although those resolutions have yet to be implemented owing to rejection and intransigence on the part of Israel, the occupying Power, they continue to provide a basic safety net for the rights of our people and a foundation for the achievement of justice, which is in turn a precondition for the attainment of peace. Here we recall that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) are the basis of the Middle East peace process that it is our aim to complete.
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> "In connection with the work of the United Nations, I refer with gratitude to the efforts made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, to restore the rights of the Palestinian people and to establish peace in the region.
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> "We have been pursuing the peace process and moving it towards its goals ever since it began in Madrid in 1991 and since the signing, at the White House in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of President Clinton, of the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. With the help of many Arab and international actors, we were recently able to conclude with Mr. Barak's Government in Israel the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signed in Egypt under the auspices of President Hosni Mubarak. We have begun to implement the Memorandum in a sensible manner that, we hope, will move us forward.
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> "We remain extremely concerned nevertheless at the many unlawful Israeli practices and policies that

contravene the resolutions of the United Nations and undermine the peace process. Chief among these are settlement activities, including the establishment of new settlements, the expansion of existing ones, the expropriation of land and the illegal transfer of Israeli civilians into the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds al-Sharif and areas in and around Bethlehem.

"We are also embarking on negotiations on a permanent settlement, which will include important and difficult issues that are immutable in terms of the minimum rights acceptable to the Palestinian side. These include our rights with respect to East Jerusalem as part of the territories occupied in 1967 and as capital of our Palestinian State; the rights of Palestinian refugees to return or receive compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and our right to the territory occupied in 1967, with the requirement that Israel withdraw completely therefrom, in implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

"We need the support and assistance of the international community if we are to undertake the difficult tasks entrusted to us and achieve a definitive solution by the agreed deadline of September 2000. We need the sustained efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, including President Clinton, the Russian Federation, the European Union, Japan, China, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Islamic countries and our Arab brothers, especially Egypt and Jordan, as well as of our many friends everywhere, in particular here at the United Nations.

"On the eve of the celebration marking the beginning of the third millennium since the birth of Jesus Christ in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem, I am confident that the suffering of our people is drawing to a close. I trust in the Committee's continued support and assistance to us towards the achievement of our rights and I am confident that Palestine will participate in the forthcoming Millennium Summit of the United Nations as a Member State.

"In conclusion, I should also like to greet the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, a comrade in the struggle for freedom and justice. I salute all the faithful friends of our people and invite them to join us in the celebration of the completion of the second millennium since the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, marking a global historical and religious occasion."

The message was signed by Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and respectfully ask him to convey the Committee's sincere thanks and greetings to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, for the important message we have just heard. I should like to assure President Arafat and the Palestinian people of the firm determination of the Committee to continue and intensify its efforts within the framework of its mandate to contribute to the promotion of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our invited guests to leave the Chamber. As he is to embark on a mission overseas in just a few hours, the Secretary-General was compelled to leave earlier, for which he conveys his apologies. On behalf of the Committee, I should like once again to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I call on Mr. John de Saram of Sri Lanka, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, to make a statement on behalf of the Special Committee.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: I have the honour, on this important occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to convey to the Palestinian people, to the Chairman and to this gathering the respects of the members of the Special Committee.

Under its terms of reference, established by the General Assembly, the Special Committee is obligated to

inform the General Assembly whether or not the conditions affecting human rights in the occupied territories are in conformity with international standards and with the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which the General Assembly and the Security Council have affirmed applies to the occupied territories.

The Special Committee has not had access to the occupied territories, it is true; yet, it is not possible for the Special Committee to report otherwise than it has done repeatedly to the General Assembly that there is in the occupied territories — undoubtedly because of the overall tensions that cloud life in the territories — a comprehensive and elaborate system of laws and regulations and administrative measures in place that seem to curtail very restrictively all aspects of the lives of the peoples of the occupied territories and to infringe significantly and substantially on their human rights.

In the last year the Special Committee heard a number of Israeli nationals knowledgeable as to human rights — lawyers, social workers and others — speak movingly and impressively of their awareness and of their concerns that things still are not as they should be in the occupied territories. It was refreshing and encouraging for the Special Committee to learn of some occasions of meetings between Palestinians and Israelis of the younger generation showing what appeared to the Special Committee to be a willingness between the Israelis and Palestinians of that generation to meet and communicate with one another and bridge the divide.

The decision a few months ago by the Supreme Court of Israel to prohibit certain extreme, coercive methods of interrogation, the easing, a few weeks ago, of residency restrictions on Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and the recent opening of access between Gaza and the West Bank are also encouraging examples of what seems to be a more enlightened view that will, it is to be hoped, lead to some measure of easing of the difficult conditions in the occupied territories, even while solutions to the many complexities of the peace process are being sought.

Today is an appropriate day on which to reaffirm on behalf of the Special Committee its commitment to ensuring that it continues to be an impartial and objective voice, but nevertheless an adequate and effective voice, as to conditions affecting human rights in the occupied territories. It is, of course, the profound hope of the Special Committee that the peace process will soon be satisfactorily concluded through the bilateral negotiations on which the two parties have already embarked.

On the eve of the new millennium, I have the honour to express the profound hope of the Special Committee that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace — long awaited by all the peoples of the region — shall at last be achieved, resolving the many political, economic, social and human difficulties that have troubled the lives of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories for such a long period of time.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ambassador John de Saram for his statement. I would like to thank him in particular for his personal efforts at the head of the Special Committee — a Committee that has done important work in the context of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Dumisana Shadrack Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I have the honour to convey a message by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Thabo Mbeki of the Republic of South Africa, to the Palestinian people on this very important day. The message reads as follows.

> "On behalf of the people of South Africa and the Non-Aligned Movement, I extend warm greetings to the Palestinian nation and to President Yasser Arafat on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We salute all Palestinians, wherever they may be. More than 50 years after the United Nations voted to accord the Palestinian people a national homeland, this dream remains unfulfilled. Yet, you remain committed in your struggle for the attainment of Statehood.
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> "We express our unflagging support for the continued efforts of the Palestinian people, under the leadership of President Yasser Arafat, to achieve their inalienable national rights, including the right to liberty, self-determination and to Statehood on their own land.
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> "We are convinced that the path of peaceful negotiation is the only means of ending conflict and of bringing peace and security to Palestine, Israel and the rest of the region. This is surely possible only through

committed negotiations and faithful implementation of all agreements reached thus far.

"The signing of the Sharm El-Sheik Memorandum and the positive steps taken by both the Palestinians and Israelis to move the Middle East process forward in order to achieve an equitable and lasting peace are truly encouraging developments filled with hope and promise for the future of the region. In this regard, we would reiterate our firm conviction that there is no alternative to the formula of exchanging land for peace, thereby affording the Palestinian people their own national territory.

"Despite these new developments, the Palestinian people continue to suffer humiliation and economic hardship. Many still live in exile as refugees and cannot yet see any definitive end to their misery.

"The legitimate expectations emanating from the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 and the initial expectations of progress were met by obstacles and frustrating delays, particularly during the period when Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu was Prime Minister of Israel. Fortunately, however, the peace process has once more been resuscitated. The negotiations on a final status agreement have added new momentum to the process.

"Since the signing of the Sharm El-Sheik Memorandum and the recent Oslo summit, there has been a renewed positive spirit in the quest for peace, and the resumption of negotiations will provide fresh hope to the Palestinian people.

"South Africa and the world stand by the Palestinian nation in its rightful quest for freedom and statehood within land which is theirs alone to govern. We call upon the international community to remain steadfast in its commitment and support for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the realization of the legitimate rights of all Palestinians. The people of Palestine, and indeed the whole region, need our support for their efforts to put an end to a conflict that has plagued the world for so many decades.

"It is clear that peace will not only have an effect on the lives of the people of these ancient lands, but that it will also reverberate around the globe. It will promote the cause of international peace and security in a fundamental way.

"The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its traditional and longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine.

"In this vein, and on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Government of South Africa, I reiterate, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, our solidarity with and support for the struggle of the Palestinians to live in dignity as free men and women and to attain the prosperity, security and sovereignty they so richly deserve."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to ask Mr. Dumisana Shadrack Kumalo kindly to convey to Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Committee's sincere gratitude for his very important message.

I would also request him to convey the Committee's deep appreciation for his leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement and for his diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis the parties concerned to ensure progress in the peace process.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Michel Kafando, Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations, to read a message from Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of the Committee on Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the tireless efforts you have been making to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Organization of the Islamic Conference, on whose behalf I am speaking today, is following closely the work of the Committee in its role as a seeker of peace.

We wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, of our support for the achievement of this lofty goal. The entire Islamic Ummah associates itself with this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and fervently hopes for the advent of an era of peace and fraternity in Palestine and throughout the Middle East as a whole.

It is for that reason that the Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, in agreement with the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, President Khatami, has asked me to deliver the following message to the Committee and to the representatives gathered here on this memorable day:

"On this day — 29 November 1999 — the entire world is commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Palestinian people have for a half- century been struggling courageously to realize their legitimate aspirations: the right to life, the right to exist.

"The international community, which cannot turn a blind eye on this fight for justice, is daily deploying increasing efforts — through international organizations, in particular the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference — in its quest for a just and lasting solution.

"I am particularly pleased, therefore, at the willingness shown by the parties concerned and by all of the parties involved to pursue the negotiations on the basis of the Wye River and Sharm El-Sheik agreements, which have cleared the way for peace between the Palestinian people and Israel.

"In my current capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, I wish to reaffirm the full solidarity of our Islamic Ummah with the Palestinian people with respect to its actions aimed at achieving its noble objectives. I hope that the impetus underlying cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis will be strengthened, so that the dawn of the year 2000 will usher in an era of lasting peace. I am convinced that the Middle East will be an example of peace for the new millennium and provide inspiration for the negotiation of other conflicts in the world.

"On this day, I would like to commend the constant efforts that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the auspices of its Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguene Ka, continue to make to assist the Palestinian cause and promote peace in the Middle East. Furthermore, I would like to pay a warm tribute to the President of the Palestinian Authority, the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and to commend his efforts to seek a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Long live the Palestinian people. Long live solidarity and cooperation among peoples."

The message was signed at Ouagadougou, on 26 November 1999, by Youssouf Ouédraogo, President of the Organization of the Islamic Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Your Excellency, and I would like to say how much the Committee appreciates the message you have just conveyed on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Abdelkader Mesdoua, Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Algeria to the United Nations, who will give a message on behalf of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Mesdoua (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your tireless efforts as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to thank you for having given my delegation an opportunity to participate on behalf of the member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and on behalf of Algeria in this important commemorative meeting and to support the just cause of the fraternal Palestinian people.

On the occasion of the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to express to the Committee on behalf of the Algerian delegation and on behalf of the member States of the OAU, which is being chaired by His Excellency Mr. Abdellaziz Bouteflika, my warmest and most sincere congratulations to the Palestine people and to its political leadership, headed by His Excellency President Arafat.

More than half a century has passed since the General Assembly adopted the resolution giving the Palestinian people the right to their own independent State. Yet today this people continues to be deprived of its legitimate right to live in peace on its native soil. It continues to face the bitter realities of foreign occupation, daily humiliation and deportation.

The many peoples of Africa have never stopped giving evidence of their support for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people. This support is an outgrowth of the

struggle for liberation that Africa courageously undertook to break the shackles of colonialism and foreign domination. This struggle was crowned by Africa's victory over the anachronistic and detestable system of apartheid.

Inspired by these ideals of liberty, justice and peace, forged during its struggle for emancipation, Africa has always viewed the struggle of the Palestinian people with sympathy, solidarity and commitment — because this struggle is fully a part of the legitimate struggle of all the peoples of the world for self-determination and independence.

I am also pleased to recall that the during the thirty-fifth summit of the heads of State and Government of the OAU — which Algeria had the great honour to host in Algiers from 12 to 14 July, 1999 — the heads of State and Government of Africa reaffirmed once again their unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people. This solidarity was shown in particular by the honour and respect with which His Excellency President Yasser Arafat was received and in the full and staunch support shown to him by his African brothers.

During this same summit, the heads of State and Government of Africa also reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people, with the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to enjoy its alienable national rights, including its right to return to its territory and to recover its property, its right to self-determination and its right to establish an independent State on its own national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the principles and resolutions of international legitimacy. The heads of State and Government of Africa also reaffirmed their support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve these objectives.

On this solemn commemorative day, Africa urgently appeals to the entire international community and, in particular, to the sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East to redouble their efforts so that the current negotiations between the parties result in the restoration to the Palestinian people of its legitimate, inalienable rights, in particular its right to establish its own independent State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, as well as the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying army from the other Arab occupied territories, in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

For its part, our Organization — the United Nations — is called upon to continue to honour its responsibilities to the Palestinian people and this people's just cause. The Organization must work to restore to this people its rights, rights that have been unanimously recognized by the entire international community, in accordance with international legitimacy.

In this context, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is called upon to play a leading role during this crucial phase, in continuing to further mobilize action and support promoting this noble cause until that day when the martyred Palestinian people will finally be able to enjoy its full legitimate national rights like all the other nations of the world.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the representative of Algeria for the message he has just delivered on behalf of the Organization of African Unity.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs of the League of Arab States, who is going to present the message of His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Medguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to address the Committee on behalf of the Secretariat of the League of Arab States and to convey to the Committee and to the States and organizations here represented the greetings of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Medguid, as well as his appreciation of all the efforts that the Committee, these States and organizations are making in the service of the question of Palestine and of all just causes throughout the world.

It is a great honour for me to join with the Committee in this United Nations commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This occasion is cherished as a symbol of the commitment of the international community to support the Palestinian people's right to exercise its inalienable national rights, including its right to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

This commemoration also provides an occasion for the League of Arab States to express its thanks and appreciation to the United Nations, and especially to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which is chaired so competently and efficiently by Ambassador Ibra Deguene Ka, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal. This Committee

provides a solid framework for pursuing matters related to the question of Palestine at the United Nations. It pursues contacts and consultations with the General Department for Palestine Affairs of the League of Arab States as regards numerous activities and programmes.

We met on this day a year ago. Participants were unanimous in their view that the Middle East peace process faced a grave dilemma because of the policies of the then Israeli Government. Now we are meeting once again, and the situation in the Middle East remains just as ambiguous and uncertain. With the victory of Mr. Barak and his assumption of power came a sense of optimism that the new Israeli Government would overcome the mistakes of its predecessor and that the peace process would get back on track, thanks to Israel's honouring of contractual commitments and respect for internationally legitimate resolutions and for the foundations of the peace process.

But many of Mr. Barak's positions call that optimism into question. He maintains his election-time refusal to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territories to the 1967 borders and his insistence on the judaization of Arab Al-Quds through the encouragement of settlements and on preventing the Palestinian people from exercising sovereignty over its own lands, resources and borders and from establishing an independent State of its own. Finally, he questions the applicability of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) to the Palestinian territories, having wasted time by reopening negotiations on the Wye River Memorandum, which had been approved by the Netanyahu Government in October 1998, in order to reframe it as the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of 4 September 1999. That relates to the Palestinian track.

The situation is no better on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks. There is a stalemate as Israel continues its aggression against innocent civilians in occupied southern Lebanon. There are many similarities between the conduct of the present and the previous Israeli Governments, which shows that, despite the change of administration, Israel has not opted for peace. Rather, it continues to view the Palestinian territories as contested lands rather than as occupied territories that must be returned to their legitimate owners. Moreover, Israeli institutions still consider that controlling and even negotiating with Palestinians are the purely internal affair of Israel. Those institutions claim the right to impose their own options, to manipulate deadlines, to try to bar the United Nations and the European Union from playing a role, and to curtail any role by the United States as a key sponsor of and participant in the peace process.

Such Israeli practices and ideas strip the peace process of its essence and undermine its foundations. They threaten eventually to explode the region and return it to a spiral of violence: people cannot tolerate injustice forever, especially on core questions of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, such as Al-Quds, settlements, the rights of refugees, and self-determination.

Responsibility to protect the peace process lies first and foremost with the United Nations and with the sponsors of the peace process, then with the international community at large. The decision by the Arab side to choose peace as a strategic option is still in place, but this does not prevent the League of Arab States from issuing a robust warning about Israel's attempts to promote the impression that all is proceeding smoothly in the peace process, and about Israel's attempts to undermine United Nations resolutions relevant to the question of Palestine and to improve its situation within the United Nations system and within regional groups. The League of Arab States is obliged to express its concern and surprise at these attempts.

I would remind those who are attempting to forget that General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which bestowed international legitimacy on the establishment of Israel, also bestowed legitimacy on the establishment of a Palestinian Arab State, and that resolution 194 (III) of 1948 continues to provide the optimal framework for a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees. The League of Arab States is making a positive contribution to laying the groundwork for the implementation of United Nations resolutions, and is responding with dedication to the call to support the Palestinian people and to help it build institutions and an independent State of its own.

In that connection, since the beginning of the peace process, the League of Arab States, in cooperation with United Nations and with intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies, has been supporting reconstruction and development. First of all, on several occasions we have joined the private sector in supporting the Palestinian economy. Secondly, we have supported education. Thirdly, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid chairs an Arab committee on the drafting of the Palestinian constitution. Fourthly, Mr. Abdel Meguid recently convened a conference at Cairo, on 13 and 14 November, on the main features of the Palestinian monetary system; representatives of a variety of international organizations attended that conference.

In the next phase, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, we shall launch a broad technical

programme of vocational training for Palestinians. We are preparing for a seminar to be held at Vienna on Palestinian refugees, in cooperation with this Committee and with the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

While the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East problem, and while the achievement of a just solution to that question is a prerequisite for the security and stability of the region, there are other causes of turmoil in the Middle East, foremost among them the situation in Iraq and the ramifications of the second Gulf war. The Iraqi people continues to pay an exorbitant price for the restructuring of the world order and for overlapping strategic and political interests — the same price paid by the Kuwaiti people and by the other peoples of the region. At the same time, we do not know who benefits from this ongoing tragedy. I say to the States permanent members of the Security Council that there is no further reason to continue the sanctions that have been in place against Iraq since its withdrawal from Kuwait. I say to them also that they should ask the Arab peoples; they will get a single answer: that they should immediately lift the embargo against Iraq in the framework of resolutions of international legitimacy, not only in a spirit of justice and equity, but for their own security, political and economic interests.

As Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid said to the Egyptian Council on Foreign Affairs, positive engagement rather than confrontation is the best way to achieve appropriate solutions to challenges and crises. It is high time that Iraq were free and stable once again, to enable it to play its accustomed role in the Arab system and to participate with other States on an equal footing in building stability, peace and development in the Middle East.

An important component of a Middle East peace is the positive and effective role of the international community in urging all sides to move the process forward. For that role to retain its legitimacy, it must continue to be based on resolutions of international legitimacy and on the principles of the peace process, and it must always be marked by integrity and impartiality.

In addition to the role played by all States known for their support of Arab rights, I must make special mention of the role of the European Union, its laudable support for the Palestinian economy and its initiatives to promote the peace process on every possible occasion. The League of Arab States greatly appreciates that role, which is based on the history of European-Arab relations and on the network of common security, political and economic interests. We urge the European Union to continue to play this role without tumbling into the pitfall of Israeli deception.

The role of the United States continues to loom large in the peace process. That country has been a sponsor of the process from the very outset. But it is no secret that there are problems facing the United States; it must transform itself from Israel's traditional strategic ally to a more neutral mediator among the parties to the conflict. The Arab side notes with great appreciation the role played by the United States Administration, especially President Clinton, in defending the peace process and in the achievement of the Wye River Memorandum. But we are concerned at the pressure exerted by some pro-Israel lobbyists on the United States media and on the United States legislature, and at the flagrant pro-Israel bias that is apparent at times. Examples are the issue of Al-Quds and the transfer of the United States Embassy to that city and the efforts to conclude a strategic alliance between the United States and Israel on the pretext of encouraging Israel and helping it accommodate itself to the process of making peace with the Arabs.

On this occasion, I cannot but commend the important letter sent to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States by the Foreign Minister of Panama, stating that the Republic of Panama, in conformity with the principles of international peace and security, has no intention of transferring the Panamanian embassy from Tel Aviv to Al-Quds al-Sharif.

The establishment of peace in the Middle East is dependent not on documents and declarations of goodwill, but on the achievement of justice and balance among the interests of the peoples of the region. That alone can open the door to true co-existence and cooperation. Only when that happens will we achieve irreversible peace.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would like to ask Mr. Kamal to convey the Committee's sincere thanks to Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel-Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for his message.

I now call on Mr. Don Betz, who will make a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

Mr. Betz (International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine): I wish to express our sincere appreciation to you, Sir, and to the members of the Committee and the

Division for the continuing support of the work of non-governmental organizations.

At this moment, I have the honour to represent the dedication and involvement of thousands of representatives of non-governmental organizations from every continent, and from Palestine and Israel, who daily tell the story of the Palestinian people to the public, the media and elected officials. Some of these non-governmental organization representatives are present in this Chamber today. These non-governmental organizations are united by their firm belief that peace will be won only when justice is secured. They are active members of the civil society mentioned so often here by the speakers.

For decades, non-governmental organizations and others have been advocates for the rights of the Palestinians — for their right to the normal life that so many of us assume to be our birthright. Non-governmental organizations have been rich resources for the United Nations, with which they have worked in close cooperation on this issue since 1982, as well as for Governments and intergovernmental agencies. Non-governmental organizations have often served as humanity's eyes and ears, speaking out in order to concentrate public attention on the harsh realities of Palestinian life. Non-governmental organizations have voiced the truth as they see it, sometimes exposing obfuscation, mythology and mendacity. They have often said what others were unable or unwilling to articulate. The non-governmental organizations link people to people, directly bringing people to witness and give testimony to what they have seen. Non-governmental organizations are active locally on the ground and internationally, networking in the international arena to present first-hand accounts of developments to those with decision-making influence.

A serious challenge facing all of us today is apathy in the face of frequent news reports about the status of the peace process. Some media stories may leave the impression that there is nothing left to do when, in fact, what is vital for a sustainable and real peace is increased advocacy and involvement during this delicate phase. The Palestinian people continue to need the support of the international community — governmental and non-governmental, public and private — in their struggle to achieve human rights and self-determination.

On 26 November 1999, representatives of non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine from different parts of the world met at United Nations Headquarters in New York at the invitation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The gathered non-governmental organizations reaffirmed the minimum requirements for a comprehensive and lasting peace. They include the Israeli withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem; the dismantling of all Israeli settlements in these territories; the establishment of an independent State of Palestine in these territories; the implementation of the right of return for all Palestinian refugees to their homes; and the release of all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails. All of these principles are enshrined in various United Nations resolutions and in the Fourth Geneva Convention.

During the meeting, all the non-governmental organizations expressed their deep concern over the Israeli Government's position and the statements known as Mr. Barak's "four noes" policy, which reject the minimum requirements stated earlier. This policy cannot lead to the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable State that guarantees the minimum national and political rights of the Palestinian people. Due to the preponderance of coercive power available to Israel, the best outcome — if it is left to Israelis and Palestinians alone — will be an imposed Bantustan-type agreement. History has shown us how short-lived and destabilizing such agreements are. Therefore, we call on the United Nations Member States, and especially the United States of America, to assume their legal and moral responsibility and ensure the full implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions related to this question of Palestine.

The non-governmental organizations will persist in initiating their supportive activities. We look forward to a continuing constructive relationship with the United Nations. Over the years, the non-governmental organizations have demonstrated their persistence in doing the right thing. This responsibility we openly and willingly embrace.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Betz for the valuable contribution that non-governmental organizations have always made to the work of the Committee.

I now have the honour to announce that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of names of those who have sent them.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, President of the Republic of Indonesia; His Majesty Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah of Malaysia; His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Le Général de Brigade Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Excellency Mr. Jamil Mahuad Witt, President of the Republic of Ecuador; His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana; His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; His Excellency Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr. Alberto Fujimori Fujimori, Constitutional President of the Republic of Peru; His Excellency Mr. Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland; His Excellency Mr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, President of Mexico; His Excellency Mr. Joseph Ejército Estrada, President of the Republic of the Philippines; and His Excellency Mr. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation.

We have also received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand; His Excellency Mr. Zhu Rongji, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Dato' Seri Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia; His Excellency Mr. Edward Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta; His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of the Republic of India; His Excellency The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho; Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; and His Excellency Mr. Bülent Ecevit, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey.

The following Ministers for Foreign Affairs have sent messages: His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara' of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency Mr. Yohei Kono of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Borys Tarasyuk of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al- Alawi Bin Abdulla of the Sultanate of Oman, His Excellency Mr. Guido di Tella of the Argentine Republic, Her Excellency Mrs. Lila Ratsifandriamanana of the Republic of Madagascar, His Excellency Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar of Malaysia, His Excellency Mr. Guillermo Fernández de Soto of the Republic of Colombia, and His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Benaissa of the Kingdom of Morocco.

We have also received messages from the Governments of Uruguay and Zimbabwe.

Messages have also come from representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: His Excellency Mr. Azzedine Laraki, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; and His Excellency Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity.

We have also received messages from a non-governmental organization, the Palestine Federation of Peru.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Kings, heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations I have just mentioned, as well as to all participants for their ceaseless efforts to achieve a solution to the question of Palestine and for the steadfast support they have always given to the work of the Committee.

The statements we have heard and the messages of solidarity that we have received today demonstrate once again the determination of the international community to progress towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East through the attainment of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with international law.

I can affirm that all members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort towards the achievement of those objectives.

I now have the honour and the pleasure to call on Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the conclusion of this meeting at United Nations Headquarters convened to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, it is my great pleasure to convey profound thanks to all of you and to all those who participated in commemorating this occasion in supporting and assisting the Palestinian people through their presence and expressions of support. I would like to single out the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. I would also like to extend my thanks to the heads of State or Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs who participated by sending messages of solidarity with the people of Palestine, as well as to the Chairmen of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

Such international unanimity is an expression of an overwhelming desire on the part of the international community to establish peace by supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State on their national soil, and it supports the peace process that serves these objectives and that of the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and their properties.

This meeting and its insistence on supporting the rights of the Palestinian people are an international initiative calling for respect for the resolutions of the United Nations, which remains the sole custodian of peace, security and stability in the world. The Organization also upholds the rights of peoples to self-determination and to end colonialism and occupation. It also seeks to protect human rights in order to enable mankind to enjoy freedom from hegemony and domination.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot but commend with appreciation the tireless efforts you and your brotherly country, Senegal, have deployed in the service of the cause of Palestine, as well as the serious work that has been done towards achieving the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Chairman, your unflagging efforts at the head of this Committee, which is dedicated to the achievement of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, have strengthened the hopes of our people in the unwavering commitment of the United Nations and the international community to achieving a just solution to the question of Palestine and to the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, as well as the United Nations and its Member States, for participating in this meeting in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, as an indispensable basis for the maintenance of peace in the region and the creation of favourable conditions for peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank Mr. Kaddoumi for his continuous updates on the latest developments in the area. I would like in particular to reaffirm that the Committee will continue to make every effort to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable and legitimate rights, particularly the right to determine their own destiny in peace and dignity.

We have received two further messages. One is a very important message from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Council of the European Union. We have also received a message from Mr. Khamtay Siphandone, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, on the occasion of the Day of Solidarity. We include them in the expression of gratitude that the Committee has just addressed to the monarchs and heads of State who have sent messages.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the Department of Public Information, and everyone who works behind the scenes, including those who provide for our security.

I also want to remind everyone that a Palestinian art exhibit presented by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine will be opened at 6 p.m. today in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibit, entitled "Follow the Star: Images from the Palestinian City of Bethlehem at the New Millennium", is composed of a collection of very fine paintings by Palestinian artists. The opening of the exhibit will be followed by a reception, to which all are cordially invited.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.